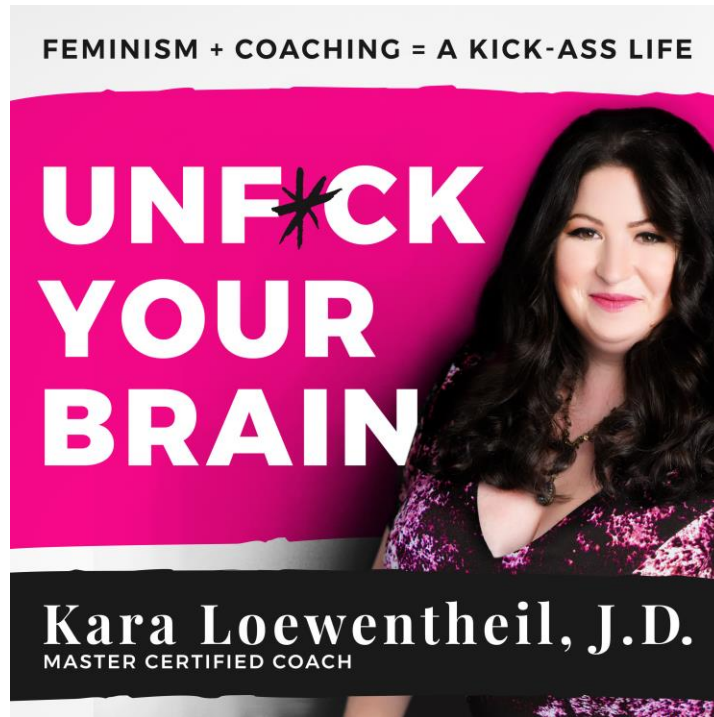


UFYB 17: WHAT CREATES YOUR PERSONALITY



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB 17: WHAT CREATES YOUR PERSONALITY

Welcome to *Unfuck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And how here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Okay, y'all, so tell me this – do you think chickens have personalities? I'm using chickens since I call you all my chickens. I bet if you've ever owned chickens, you think that they do. Humans are so obsessed with the idea of personalities that we project personalities onto animals, pets, even household objects.

Many of us are known to say something like, “My computer just stopped – it just gets difficult and I have to restart it.” Or we'll take something in to be repaired and we'll say, “Oh of course, now that the repair person is looking at it, it's working fine.”

We're obsessed with the idea of personality. And people have been coming up with theories about why we are the way we are since probably time immemorial. Just among modern personality theories, there's a whole bunch that include dispositional; which is like your traits. Psychodynamic has to do with the psychological dynamics in the family; humanistic, biological, behaviorist, revolutionary – there's even something called social learning perspective. So it's just like a handful of some of the modern theories of personality.

But I have my own theory, and that's what I'm going to share with you today. Now, I think that personality is a heuristic that we use to understand other people's behavior and our own. We've talked a lot on the podcast about how the brain wants to be energy efficient. It wants to save all our energy, in case you are going to starve or have to outrun a lion, right. It

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doesn't want to interpret every new stimulus and try to figure out what to think of it; so it comes up with shortcuts.

Some of those are useful, like your brain just remembers what a car is and how to drive it, and it remembers to be afraid of wolves but not afraid of lapdogs. But sometimes, those shortcuts can have pitfalls, and I think this applies to personality. We don't want to have to consider and analyze every time someone does something, so we decide on a theory about what their personality is like and then we interpret everything through that.

If you were born in the 1980s, like I was – I was born in the very early 80s – you may have had a synthesizer keyboard growing up. For you millennials who don't know what I'm talking about, this was an electronic keyboard and it had these shortcut settings you could push. So you could set it to, like, jazz or reggae or classical. And once you pushed that button, whatever you played would come out in that tone. So no matter what the notes were, they would jazzify it or reggaefy it or classicalify it. It would have these sound effects.

I think we use personality the same way. We decide that other people are nice or mean or generous or stingy or supportive or critical or giving or selfish. And then we filter whatever they say or do through that synthesizer setting.

So if a friend you think is supportive says, "Oh I have some ideas for your new business," you probably feel great. You feel warm and excited. You are thinking the thought that they care about you and that the ideas might be great. Meanwhile, if a relative that you think doesn't believe in you says the same sentence to you, you're probably going to feel angry because you think the thought that they don't think you know what you're doing.

Same action from two different people – you have no idea what their thoughts are, but you filter it through your idea of what their personality is

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and you react totally differently. You also do the same thing with your own personality. Most of us find it a little chaotic to think about all the time we've been alive and all the things that we've said and done and felt. So thinking about ourselves as having a certain personality helps us organize experience.

Most of us have a litany of things that we think are wrong with us, and we think that these are personality characteristics; like they are part of us. We think we're selfish or lazy or loud or too sensitive or too critical, too emotional, that we're undeserving or unlovable. We think these are actual aspects of our personalities. And then once we have that belief, we can go through all of our behavior to find evidence for it. It's like playing go-fish; we're constantly looking for matches between how we think, feel and act, and these personality traits that we've decided that we have.

We also constantly scan our past for more evidence of these personality traits – and then we find a match, we tell ourselves it's proof that we just are this way. And then we heap guilt and shame and judgment on ourselves in order to try to make ourselves act differently. And that never works because shame and guilt and judgment cause humans to hide, avoid, distract or lash out; none of which improve our feelings or actions.

My clients are so fond of saying to me, "I'm just this kind of person. I'm just a sensitive person. I've just always been someone who finds it difficult to get my shit together. I've always been someone who procrastinates. I've just always been someone who takes things personally, or I've just always been someone who feels things really sensitively." I used to think all of this about myself too. "I'm this kind of person. I'm that kind of person."

We use that to understand ourselves in the world. But part of the problem is, thinking that way, I would argue, actually makes it harder to understand our self in the world, because we are not just meeting reality where it is. Instead, we're coming to it with a story and then we're filtering everything through that.

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So, here's the mind-blowing concept I want you to consider today. And this podcast may be kind of short, actually, because I don't want to belabor the point, I just really want you to marinate in this idea. What if you don't have a personality at all?

What if everything you do is just an action that results from a feeling that results from a thought? That's what I teach you. You have a thought. A thought is a sentence in your mind. You think the thought and then you have a feeling. A feeling is a sensation in your body. So the sentence in your mind that you think creates a physical sensation in your body. And then that feeling drives your action.

When you feel angry, you snap. When you feel guilty, you mope. When you feel anxious, you avoid. Your actions flow naturally from the feelings you have. And most humans react to most feelings in the same way. When we feel anxious, we avoid or numb out. When we feel angry, we lash out. When we feel love, we express warmth. When we feel sad, we cry.

So what if your actions are simply driven by your feelings which are driven by your thoughts? What if anyone in the world who had the thought you had would feel and act the same way when they had it? Do you see what that would mean? It means that you aren't any particular kind of person. You're not a selfish person. You're not a mean person. You're not a lazy person. You're just a person who has certain thoughts that lead to certain feelings that lead to certain actions.

If you wanted to change how you acted, you'd need to change your feelings. If you wanted to change your feelings, you'd change your thoughts. Your thoughts produce your actions. And your thoughts come from a million sources; your parents, your friends, society, your education, your work, what you read, what you listen or hear, the random synaptic firings in your brain. Your thoughts are not moral; they're just sentences in your brain.

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So if your thoughts aren't moral and they just cause your feelings and actions, like machinery or math, you don't have a personality. You're just a collection of past thoughts and feelings and actions. And sometimes that seems scary, but I think that's immensely freeing. It means that if you want to act differently, you don't have to change some kind of deep personality trait. You don't have to cure some kind of personality flaw or defect.

You just have to learn how to think differently on purpose; that's it. Once you think differently, you'll feel and act differently. I used to be someone who took everything personally. I was overly sensitive. I thought I was lazy and selfish. I thought I was unlovable. I thought I just felt things more deeply than other people; that I was very active, that I was very anxious, that I was perfectionistic. I believed all these things were my personality and that if they were my personality then they couldn't be changed.

We love to call things just how we are because it takes all the responsibility off of us. It's just how we are; it can't be changed. My class will say this to me even when I'm teaching them to change their thoughts. Then they'll just turn it into, sometimes, "Well my personality is just really hard to change my thoughts." No, it's hard for all humans to change their thoughts." That's why you need a coach to teach you how to do it. If it was really easy, we could all do it by ourselves.

That's how deeply ingrained this idea is that we just are a certain way. We think that that sets us apart and helps us know who we are. But believing you are a certain way actually blocks you from knowing yourself, because then you're filtering everything through this story about who you are and you're not able to see the reality that you are capable of a lot of different ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

So being so attached to a story about who you are to your story about your personality, it actually prevents you from knowing yourself; it doesn't help you know yourself. What people want to do is figure out who they are, think they know themselves and then lean more into that. "Well, I'm someone

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who's super sensitive, so when I know that about myself, I just have to protect myself from ever getting triggered by anything outside of me." That is the exact opposite of empowered. What if you make space for the idea that you just react strongly to things because of the thoughts and feelings you have, and that if you learn to pay attention to those, to be present with those, to be present with the reality of what's happening and to change your thoughts and feelings, you could become less sensitized; able to deal with more things and actually be more open to the world, not less.

I was someone who believed all those negative thoughts about myself, but now, I don't take things so personally anymore. I almost never cry about someone else's behavior because I don't make it mean anything about me, even though I thought I was just a supremely sensitive person. I work really hard in my business, even though I used to think that I was just a lazy person. I give a lot to my clients and my followers. I love many people and I receive their love, even though I used to think that I was broken and unlovable.

I didn't have to fix myself; there wasn't anything wrong with me. I didn't get a lobotomy. I didn't have to repair some kind of deep personality flaw. I just learned how to think different thoughts, and that meant I felt differently and I acted differently; no drama, no judgment, no shame, no stories about being one kind of person or another, no beliefs about having one kind of personality or another.

Do you feel how that takes the weight off of you? You don't feel like you have a personality characteristic that is mysterious and hard to change. You don't have a self that was formed in mysterious ways by your childhood, that you can only recreate by going back through the past again and again; none of that shit. You just have a past set of actions that were created by the thoughts and feelings you had at the time.

This is so important. And so many people, they get the concept that in the present, and even in the future, their thoughts and feelings cause their

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actions, but they don't apply it to the past. They think, "Well I was this way, so that's because of the kind of person I was, or the kind of person I am." No, in the past, you had thoughts that made you have feelings that made you take actions; that's all. Back then, you didn't know that your thoughts caused your feelings and your actions, so you had no tools to do anything differently.

That's fine; the past is over. Yesterday is as far away as Ancient Rome in terms of your ability to change the past. But all that happened in the past is that you had thoughts, feelings and actions; just like the present, just like the future. And in the past, you weren't aware of them. You weren't a certain kind of person. You aren't a certain kind of person. You just had a certain set of thoughts, feelings and actions that you didn't know how to manage.

Now you know that this is something you can manage, so your present thoughts, feeling and actions and your future thoughts feelings and actions can be different. If you want to feel and act differently, you don't have to change your essential personality in some way. You just have to change your thoughts and you will have different feelings and actions.

You can be whatever kind of person you want to be. You can create whatever kinds of feelings and actions you want. Your personality is not fixed in stone; it's just a collection of thoughts and feelings and actions. It's just a set of habits; of thought habits. No one taught you how to manage it before, so you haven't. but once you learn how to manage your mind, you can change those whenever you want. And the same is true when you think about other people. You can't change them whenever you want – then I would really be a wizard, right. But when other people react a certain way, they just have a thought, a feeling and an action also.

Their thoughts are not any more or less moral than your thoughts. They don't have any more or less of a personality. They aren't any more or less

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of a type of person; they just have certain thought patterns that produce certain feelings and actions, that's all.

So the next time you find yourself thinking that you or someone else just has a certain kind of personality, I want you to pause and ask yourself, how do you feel when you think that? Does it feel empowering? Because I bet it doesn't. And how would your approach to the situation change if you believed that everything you were experiencing were just thoughts and feelings and actions that you could change whenever you wanted to?

It is a beautiful thought experiment, and when you really, truly internalize it, it is so freeing. So I want you to give it a try this week, and you'll be a happier chicken by the time the next podcast comes out. Now, if this podcast kind of blew your mind or gave you some hope, I want to be sure you know that the next start-date for Unfuck Your Brain is coming up soon.

So if you've been umm-ing and ah-ing about whether to apply, just stop doing that. You're now a person that takes decisive action. Sign up. Maybe you're wondering if I'm talking to you; I am. I am talking to you.

When I first started my practice, I really worried about telling people directly to work with me because I was still caught up in my own thoughts about, like, "What will they think and what will they feel," as if I cause those, right. Or worrying about whether my business would be successful or whether I'd get enough clients – but now that my practice is thriving and my business is successful, I can tell you honestly, from the bottom of my heart that I say this for you and not for me. This work will change your fucking life. It will blow your mind.

It will challenge you. It will teach you how to grow in ways you didn't believe possible. And it will be a blast because, let's be real, I am hilarious and we have a lot of fun. A client of mine recently told me that until working with me, she always felt like life would be some variety of dark and heavy. And

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now, she can't believe how incredible it feels to experience moments of lightness and to know that the more she works on her brain, the lighter her life will get.

I know exactly what that means, and I want you to know too. So get off your butt and go to www.unfckyourbrain.com/application, and fill out an application and let's get light together. Alright, y'all, I will talk to you next week.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to turbo-charge the Unfuck Your Brain Process, you can download a free five-minute self-talk makeover at www.redesignyourmind.com/selftalksoundtrack.